

What is Renewal?

Charter renewal is the process by which authorizers conduct a formal review of charter schools in order to recommend continuation of charter contract or, if necessary, the revocation of the charter. The renewal process provides an opportunity for authorizers to support growth and provide guidance for charter schools as they reflect on progress based on a set of shared standards for academic, financial, and organizational performance. In Maryland, local education agencies (LEAs) serve as authorizers for charter schools and charter liaisons are the LEA staff who manage the authorizing process including approval, monitoring, and renewal. To ensure that the renewal process works as intended, shared understanding of purpose and open and consistent communication are essential. This allows charter authorizers, represented by the liaisons who work directly with schools, to facilitate a renewal process that is thorough, transparent, and publicly defensible. The standards for renewal should be drawn directly from the school's original charter performance contract, so that the renewal process is simply a formal way of ensuring that progress is being made toward those original expectations that align with the school's mission and vision. The renewal process also serves as a guardrail for charter schools as they grow and evolve, creating a formal process for identifying questions and concerns with appropriate time to respond and make plans for adjustments within the timeline of their charter contract.

“... a quality authorizer designs and implements a transparent and rigorous process that uses comprehensive and reliable data to inform merit-based renewal decisions.”

National Association of Charter School Authorizers' (NACSA) Principles & Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing states that, “a quality authorizer designs and implements a transparent and rigorous process that uses comprehensive and reliable data to inform merit-based renewal decisions.” Throughout the process, it is critical that charter authorizers maintain appropriate balance between their oversight responsibilities and their duty to respect charter schools' autonomy.

This document is designed to highlight key questions and decision points that charter authorizers in Maryland should consider when planning for renewal. Where applicable, references to the Education Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland, Section 9 and/or Opinions of the State Board of Education are included. The full text may be accessed here: [Maryland Education Article §9](#) or here: [Maryland General Assembly Statute look-up](#). Opinions of the State Board of Education are numbered consecutively beginning with the last two digits of the year, followed by the number of the Opinion. For example, [Opinion No. 05-26](#) is the 26th opinion issued in 2005. Opinions of the State Board are available here: [Opinions of the State Board](#).

This document also includes links to exemplars and related resources. It is important to note that the examples highlighted in this document may or may not be applicable in all counties given the need to design the process in a way that aligns with local policies; protects charter autonomy while ensuring schools’ educational programs are working for students; and prioritizes what works for students and families. Local and national exemplars referenced in this document are linked in this document. MSDE has created for Maryland Charter Liaisons, designed to curate applicable policy guidance and best practice exemplars for charter liaisons in a number of key practice areas, including the charter renewal process. For additional information about the process in any Maryland LEA, contact the LEA’s Charter Liaison. The [Maryland Charter Liaisons](#) contact list is updated at least annually.

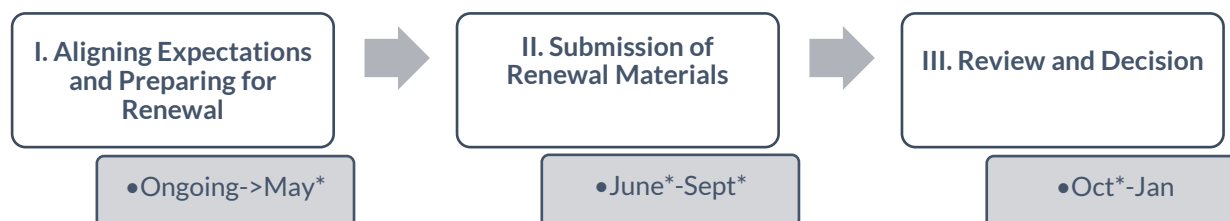
Key Phases of Renewal and Timeline Considerations

The table below offers a summary of key renewal activities grouped into three phases. The first phase, Aligning Expectations and Preparing for Renewal, includes the formal initiation of the renewal process, which often happens the spring prior to the expiration of a charter contract; the release of information about key dates associated with the renewal process; any new information about what charters should submit as part of their renewal application; and the provision of preliminary renewal data to schools by the authorizer. It is important to note that this initial phase should be informed by ongoing communication with the charter school (facilitated by the liaison), along with any site visits and data-gathering efforts that happen throughout the duration of the charter contract. The second phase is the Submission of Renewal Materials, where schools submit documentation of their renewal application, with the opportunity to respond to any questions and/or comments from the authorizer in the preliminary renewal report that warrant clarification and/or additional data. This often happens in the summer and fall of the final charter contract year. The third phase is the Review and Decision phase, when recommendations are presented and public comments are gathered (via multiple modalities if possible), culminating in a final decision of the local school board. This process generally begins in late fall and concludes in December or January but will vary depending on local context. See below the table for some critical timeline considerations.

Phase	Renewal Activities
Aligning Expectations and Preparing for Renewal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular formal and informal site visits and communication (ongoing) • Orientation for school leader and charter school board on Renewal Application and Decision Criteria • Preliminary Renewal Data or Renewal Report provided to school by the authorizer
Submission of Renewal Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation and submission of Renewal Application by the charter school
Review and Decision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Renewal Recommendations • Public Comment Period (multiple opportunities to engage) • Renewal Decision • Communications to families and stakeholders

Sample Timeline of Renewal Phases

IMPORTANT NOTE: This is an example to illustrate how the phases described above often play out. The renewal process timelines that counties establish will vary based on local context, please see “Key Considerations and Decision Points” below.



**Indicates a month that occurs the year prior to the expiration of the charter contract*

Considerations & Decision Points for Charter Authorizers

When planning the timeline for the renewal process, charter authorizers have to consider a number of factors, including availability of important qualitative and quantitative data sets; deadlines associated with school enrollment and school selection for families; and the potential for delays during the process. Authorizers must work to balance these considerations to try and ensure ample time for decision-making and two-way communication to ensure schools and families have opportunities to get additional information as needed and to participate in the process. Timeline factors are particularly critical when the process ultimately results in a non-renewal decision. Non-renewal decisions should never come as a surprise to a charter school— there should have been ongoing communication prior to the formal renewal process that would have raised this possibility with opportunities to address issues or concerns identified. That said, a non-renewal decision is still an incredibly disruptive process for the schools and families involved and the renewal timeline must ensure that everyone impacted by this decision has adequate time to plan if a closure decision is recommended. Related to these factors, here are a few questions that charter authorizers should consider:

- How will testing dates and other student performance-related data collection efforts impact timelines?
- In the event of unanticipated, extended school closures how might renewal decision cycles be adjusted?
- How will the LEA plan the renewal timeline so that final decisions are made and communicated in sufficient time for families to choose a new school (if necessary)?
- How will the timeline be organized to account for board schedules and potential delays at the end of the Review and Decision phase?
- Does the renewal decision timeline allow families to participate in the school lottery selection (or other related processes) in the event of a closure decision?

Resources and Exemplars

- [Anne Arundel County Public Schools - Renewal Timeline](#) (see Protocol)
- [Colorado Charter School Institute - Renewal Timeline](#) (see Protocol)
- [NACSA - Sample Charter Renewal Timeline](#)

Renewal Decision Focus Areas

Based on the standards and criteria identified within their local systems, charter authorizers and the liaisons leading the process should focus on renewal indicators that speak to school effectiveness and organizational efficacy. These indicators fall into several broad areas, including Educational Program Performance; School Climate and Culture; and Governance and Finance. Within these areas, Educational Program Performance is at the core of the renewal decision process given the centrality of student learning as a consideration of school effectiveness, as well as guidance under federal law that student learning and growth should be a major factor in determining charter school effectiveness. This is also an area where schools tend to have a wealth of quantitative data. An important decision point for charter authorizers in this area is how they will establish an appropriate balance between considering the quantitative data that reflects academic growth and performance; and the qualitative data that demonstrates how schools respond to the trends in the educational program performance data they observe. To support an effective Educational Program, successful charters must also be equipped to maintain functional financial and operational practices while creating and sustaining inclusive, productive learning environments for students and their families, and positive professional settings for educators.

Districts can determine the methodology they will use to will review, analyze and synthesize the renewal data that will inform renewal decisions, provided the approach is documented clearly and understood by charter schools participating in the process (and that Educational Program Performance is a significant factor). In light of the need for simultaneous prioritization of multiple areas, some school districts use a weighted formula for charter renewal decisions. Baltimore City Schools uses the following breakdown to capture the evaluation areas considered as part of the charter renewal process: Student achievement (50%); School Climate (25%) and Financial Management and Governance (25%).

Other districts may opt not to use a weighted breakdown and instead base the assessment on a more organic synthesis of ratings across various indicators from the charter contract. In this approach, key areas and/or domains are identified, along with a scale to assess whether the school is on target with respect to the vision outlined in the charter performance contract. In either case, it is critical that the process be fair, well-documented and fully transparent for schools and families, including a coherent explanation of how qualitative and quantitative measures are integrated that can be supported from a data quality standpoint. For examples of how local districts have communicated this process, see the resources at the end of this section.

Within each renewal decision focus area, authorizers should consider what information is needed to offer meaningful insight into progress. As authorizing bodies make decisions about how to assess progress across these focus areas, renewal criteria should be communicated to charter schools as part of the initial application process. Long before the formal renewal process begins, authorizers should be gathering insight into progress in these areas through open communication and regular site visits.

Educational Program Performance

Driving Questions	Potential Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are students learning and/or making progress in core academic areas? • How does the school review and respond to trends in educational program performance data? • Are there discrepancies in performance and/or progress across student subgroups? • Has the school set learning targets for student achievement? How do they assess progress toward those targets? • If applicable, has the school made measurable progress in identified improvement areas with respect to instruction and student learning? • What should school progress be measured against? • Are students prepared for college and/or careers when they graduate? • Is there alignment between the school’s documented instructional strategies and the trends identified in the school’s growth and achievement data? • Academic programming or students with disabilities • Is there evidence that students with IEPs are receiving high quality instruction tailored to fit their needs? • What academic interventions are being used for students in need of additional instruction outside of the regular classrooms? How are these academic interventions aligned to the trends identified in the school’s data analysis? • How are academic interventions being measured for effectiveness? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance on state assessment, including comparison of disaggregated groups • Trends in performance on state assessment, including comparison of disaggregated groups • Qualitative evidence of how the school responds to key trends in student growth and performance • Student growth on state assessment • Additional sources of student performance data might include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benchmark data • Quarterly assessment data • Research-based assessments including NWEA, iReady and STAR • Formative assessment data • College and career readiness measures, including college entrance exams, completion of HS requirements • Four-year cohort graduation rate • Areas of priority improvement and root cause analysis • Academic programming or students with disabilities • School progress compared with <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prior years • Like schools • District average • Evidence of successful implementation of the school’s educational program • Indicators proposed by the charter school/negotiated with the authorizer

THE MARYLAND REPORT CARD - EDUCATIONAL PERFORMANCE DATA

Although authorizers’ decisions about Educational Program Performance indicators and how to analyze them during renewal will vary, the [Maryland Report Card](#) can serve as a valuable source of this data for all districts. Liaisons should work with the district's Accountability Officer to review data available from the Report Card. On the Report Card website, the [Help Guides](#) section provides detailed descriptions of the elements of the Report Card and how calculations are made.

The Maryland Report Card provides a substantial amount of data that can contribute to judgements about school performance, and guide support for schools. The Maryland Report Card provides school-level data that includes achievement on state assessments, growth in achievement, high school graduation rates,

student access to a well-rounded curriculum, progress in achieving English language proficiency, and readiness for postsecondary success.

There is detailed information about the performance of student groups since schools are accountable for serving all learners. Included in the report card for each school are data about each student group as compared to that of students who are not in that group.

A tool called “similar schools” will provide data about a school and for a group of schools that are similar on several demographic characteristics. School performance is compared to the average performance of a group of schools with similar student characteristics: grade span, race/ethnicity, economic disadvantage, English learners, and students with disabilities.

School Culture and Climate

Driving Questions	Potential Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the school’s Professional Development approach for staff? What evidence is there to show its effectiveness? • What strategies are done to assess the school’s climate? What action is taken as a result? • How do perceptions about school climate align across students, families and school staff? If there is misalignment, is there evidence of action taken as a result? • How does the school engage with parents and family members? • What extra-curricular activities are available to students? Are students participating in them? How have these opportunities enhanced the school’s current program? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site visit activities (e.g. School Effectiveness Review) • Parents, Teacher, Student Satisfaction • Analysis of staff turnover/retention data • Cohort Retention Rate • Chronic Absence • Suspensions • Teacher/school leader evaluation template and confirmation of completion • School bylaws • Documentation of parent engagement activities • Extracurricular activities available to students- participation data, descriptions

THE MARYLAND REPORT CARD- SCHOOL CLIMATE DATA

The [Maryland Report Card](#) includes the results from a statewide School Survey, which is taken by students, grades 5 through 11, and educators in every school, and provides information about safety, community, environment, and relationships, all of which are important factors in supporting a positive learning environment for all students.

Governance and Finance

Driving Questions	Potential Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the evidence that the charter is functioning productively as a non-profit organization? How is that evidence collected? • Is the governing board operating effectively? • What are the responsibilities of the board members vs. the responsibilities of the school leaders? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board governance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict of interest policy for board members • Meeting schedules for the board • Board self-evaluation/needs assessment

Driving Questions	Potential Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the board handle issues brought by students, faculty and/or parents at the school? • What is the contractual relationship between the school’s board and any operating partners (e.g. financial management, professional development) • What is the specific division of duties that each is accountable to perform? • How does the board monitor progress and hold itself accountable for specific outcomes? • How does the governing board hold the operator accountable for specific outcomes of the agreed upon contract? • Is the governing body able to implement measures that ensure financial and regulatory compliance? • What are the school’s financial management and internal accounting procedures? • Is there effective oversight and accountability over the school’s budget? • Does the facility comply with applicable laws and codes? • If the school provides transportation, does the school’s transportation plan comply with any applicable health and safety requirements? • Are the school’s lottery and enrollment procedures consistent with applicable state and local policies? • If lottery weights are in use, has the desired impact been achieved? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Composition of the board including length of term, background of members, and method of selection, • active sub committees, officers • including • Organizational chart • Annual board Goals • Financial practices: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual audits/management letter • Budget submission • Grants management • Procurement policy that shows protocols around decision-making • Regulatory Compliance and Reporting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timeliness of key reports (i.e. Special Education reporting/IEP document review) • Academic programming for special student populations • Compliance with laws, rules, policies, and regulations • Facilities and Transportation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School transportation plan • Comparison of current facilities use to original education specification document • Documentation of lottery and enrollment process

Considerations & Decision Points for Charter Authorizers

- What are different options for monitoring achievement and growth data for elementary, middle and high school students?
- What is the right approach for synthesizing data within each of the renewal focus areas, including quantitative and qualitative measures that speak to educational program performance? How will that approach be communicated to schools and other key stakeholders?
- If traditional assessment data is not available, what meaningful alternate strategies should be considered? How will this be communicated to schools?

Resources and Exemplars

- [Maryland Report Card](#)
- [Maryland Report Card Help Guides](#)
- [Baltimore City Public Schools - Renewal Framework](#)
- [Baltimore City Schools - Renewal Data Guidance](#)

- [Anne Arundel County Public Schools - Renewal Criteria Sheet](#) (Section IV)
- [Colorado Charter School Institute - Renewal Submissions Overview](#)
- [Colorado Charter School Institute - Financial Policies and Procedures Guidance](#)

Site Visits and Renewal

Site visits play an important role in the renewal process. They allow charter authorizers to gather information that is difficult to obtain through reporting submissions, including a deeper understanding of the overall school program through open discussion with stakeholder groups and more insight into areas of strength and areas of growth. Strategic use of school visits helps to ensure that there are no surprises during the renewal decision-making process. Formal site visits are structured engagements that involve a number of stakeholder groups within the school staff and board, including (but not limited to) individuals who can speak to and/or demonstrate progress in Educational Program Performance, as well as those who can provide insight into Finance, Governance, School Culture and Climate. Examples of formal site visit protocols from two Maryland Districts are linked below.

While formal visits, which require an investment of time and resources from both the charter authorizer and the school, may not be manageable annually, informal visits can serve as meaningful opportunities for a charter liaison to collaborate with the charter staff around specific focus areas reflected in the charter contract. Informal visits, if framed effectively and situated in a clear and appropriate purpose, can also help strengthen relationships between charter authorizers and charter staff. Informal site visits should require very little, if any, preparation on the part of the charter school staff. The charter authorizer should always give the charter school staff adequate notice of any site visit—formal or informal. Additionally, informal site visits should be used as a tool specifically for the liaison. Other district staff should not accompany the authorizer on an informal visit unless otherwise approved by the charter operator.

Considerations & Decision Points for Charter Authorizers

- What frequency is feasible for charter liaisons to make formal and/or informal site visits? MSDE recommends annual informal site visits where possible.
- Who are the key stakeholders that should be involved in ongoing formal site visits?
- What formation should be provided to the school team in advance of a formal site visit?
- What communication is needed prior to an informal site visit?
- When should the site visit in closest proximity to the renewal decision take place? Note- some authorizers do a site visit the spring to inform the renewal process early on, others do a fall visit (and/or a follow-up visit in the fall).

Resources and Exemplars

- [Anne Arundel County Public Schools - Site Visit Protocol](#) (school copy)
- [Anne Arundel County Public Schools - Site Visit Protocol](#) (reviewer copy)
- [Baltimore City Schools - School Effectiveness Reviews](#)

Preliminary Renewal Report

Charter authorizers should compile a record based on the cumulative evidence of school performance in relation to expectations as set by the Performance Framework and included in the charter contract, and communicate that record to each school that is up for renewal.

Considerations & Decision Points for Charter Authorizers

- What data will be most useful to schools early in the renewal process?
- How to ensure that charter schools and local systems are looking at the same set(s) of data?
- How can systems ensure that charter schools have opportunities to incorporate multiple alternative indicators of student progress throughout the process?
- What is the best way for the school to respond to questions and/or issues raised in the preliminary report and get sufficient clarification if needed?

Resources and Exemplars

- [Baltimore City Schools - Renewal Rubrics](#) by grade band

Renewal Application

The renewal application provides school leaders and the public with transparent expectations for renewal decision-making, including core elements that are evaluated and scored. These resources should explain the elements of the renewal process; set expectations regarding requirements and timeline; and discuss the school's prospects for renewal in light of the school's progress as indicated by the authorizer's ongoing information-gathering through site visits and other formal and informal data-gathering efforts.

Charter authorizers should use a formal renewal application and a fair and transparent process, providing schools and the public with a cumulative performance report, and making renewal decisions based on merit and objective evidence of the school's performance and progress over the term of the charter contract in accordance with the Performance Framework set forth in the charter contract. Since the renewal process may result in the closure of schools that fail to meet their performance expectations, it is important to plan the process so that decisions are made and communicated in sufficient time for families to choose a new school, if necessary.

Schools should begin working on completing the required academic, financial, and organizational/governance submissions that are part of the application during the late spring and over the summer, although the timelines will vary based on local context. Many of the submissions and documents that are required should already exist but will need to be reviewed and updated as needed prior to submission. The application will also be informed significantly by the preliminary renewal report provided by the authorizer.

Considerations & Decision Points for Charter Authorizers

- Does the renewal application establish expectations that are consistent with the original charter application and the charter performance framework?
- Is there guidance within the renewal framework and application for the charter to flag key programmatic changes that are appropriate during the renewal process, such as
 - adding a lottery weight or a lottery preference, if it requires approval

- program expansion involving addition of new classes at existing grade levels
- increasing previously established enrollment cap

Resources and Exemplars

- [NACSA - Renewal Application Guidance](#)
- [Anne Arundel County Public Schools - Renewal Application](#)

Renewal Recommendations and Public Comment Period

Renewal recommendations should be presented first to the charter schools and subsequently to the school board. If a charter school provided a response to questions and/or issues raised in the preliminary renewal report, the recommendations should include that documentation as well. Prior to any final decision, the public should have a reasonable timeframe for commenting on the decision, and multiple pathways to do so, including in person and virtual.

Key Considerations & Decision Points for Charter Authorizers

- How will the authorizer ensure that the public has multiple modalities and multiple opportunities to comment on renewal recommendations?
- How will the authorizer support transparency in the event of a closure recommendation and/or decision?
- If closure is a possibility, how will the authorizer organize the process to ensure that the timeline supports alternative options for families and school staff?
- If closure is a possibility, how would an appeal impact the timeline and the key stakeholders involved?

Resources and Exemplars

- [Baltimore City Schools - Sample Renewal Report](#)
- [Prince George's County Public Schools - Board Action for Renewal](#)

Charter School Renewal Decisions

After the initial public comment period, the final decision is made by the local board of education. For both the initial application and the renewal, the State Board has stated that transparency is important to a fair process ([Opinion 06-03](#)). The scoring rubric (numerical or otherwise) should be clear and shared with the charter school (Opinions [6-30](#), [08-21](#)) and subsequently communicated to families and other stakeholders. The law does not require that a decision be in writing ([Opinion No. 09-03](#)). However, providing the decision in writing is considered a best practice ([Opinion No. 08-38](#)). While a formal hearing is not required ([Opinion No. 06-16](#)), the charter applicant should have at minimum 24-hour notice that its application will be considered at the board meeting, with additional notice encouraged as best practice.

In the event of a renewal, the next phase involves the charter's contract negotiations. In the event of non-renewal, the authorizer should engage with the charter school in planning for closure. If the public charter school wants to challenge the decision not to renew, state law mandates that "the public charter school may appeal the decision to the State Board." ([§9-104 \(d\)](#)).

References

- [Education Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland](#)
- [U. S. Department of Education - Supporting Charter Excellence Through Quality Authorizing](#)
- [Baltimore City Schools - Charter Renewal Framework](#)
- [National Charter School Resource Center Report - Identifying Indicators of Distress in Charter Schools](#)
- [Colorado Charter School Institute - Guidance on Renewals](#)
- [NACSA - Charter School Guide to Performance Frameworks](#)
- [NACSA – Renewal Application Guidance](#)
- [National Network for District Authorizing \(NN4DA\)](#)

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